

MEDIA CONTACT:

John Howze (208) 526-9292

(Photo available on request)

Idaho National Laboratory firefighters compete in World Combat Firefighter Challenge

Firefighter Kevin Voyles sets new world record in tandem firefighting event

The U.S. Department of Energy's Idaho National Laboratory Fire Department put in a strong showing at the 2006 World Firefighter Combat Challenge in Henderson, Nev., Nov. 7-11.

INL firefighter Kevin Voyles and partner Stacy Billapando of Colorado Springs, Colo., led the charge by eclipsing their own world record in the co-ed tandem event with a time of 3:10.85. The previous record was 3:13.95.

"It was a thrill for Stacy and me to set a world record in the co-ed tandem event for the second time in less than a year," Voyles said.

Garth Barrow, Paul Bradley, Jim Sanford, David Boyce and Voyles also represented INL in team and individual events designed to test the stamina and skills of firefighters with a variety of challenges. Broadcast on ESPN for more than a decade, the five-day annual event attracts hundreds of fire departments from across the United States and Canada each year.

"I'm proud of our firefighters," said Dwayne Coburn, director of Facilities & Site Services. "No one makes them participate in this world competition. They do it because they love the challenge. To reach that level, they have to be in top physical and mental shape."

The World Firefighter Combat Challenge aims to encourage physical fitness among firefighters while demonstrating the profession's rigors to the public. Contestants wear "full bunker gear" and breathing apparatus as they perform a linked series of five tasks.

The tasks include climbing a five-story tower, hoisting, chopping, dragging hoses and rescuing a life-sized, 175-pound "victim" as they race against themselves, their opponents and the clock.

"This event really attracts the very best firefighters from the United States and Canada," Boyce said. "Preparing for it is physically very demanding, and it helps us all stay in better condition year-round."

Barrow, Boyce and Voyles competed individually in the finals of their events. Barrow placed eighth in the 45- to-49-year age group. Boyce finished sixth in the 45-49 age bracket and seventh in the chiefs class. Voyles finished fourth in the over-40 bracket.

The INL firefighters also competed as a team. The team time is figured by adding the three best times after each individual completes the physically demanding course. The INL team came up a little short of qualifying for the final day of competition for the teams, but members are in agreement the challenge was a great test of their skills.

To participate in the world competition, an individual or team must have qualified at an earlier event. INL's team qualified to compete in the world event at the national event, held in Morrow, Ga., in October.

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